

COVID RECOVERY AND YOUTH INCLUSION - THE STAR

Rabello, Steven;

Mutahi, Patrick;

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CLAMP DOWN ON SUPER-SPREADER EVENTS

HEALTH expert Professor Salim Abdool Karim this week called for legal action against super-spreader event organisers who break Covid-19 restriction rules set out by the government.

This comes as various events have over the past few weeks have led to infection rates in the country sky-rocketing.

The reality is that over the next three weeks, many South Africans will be winding down, companies will close down for the holiday season with many looking forward to travelling and spending quality time with their loved ones, or attending their favourite music festival or a wedding or two.

The bottom line, however, is that life as we have known it has drastically changed and it can't be business as usual.

If anything, with the second wave having hit South Africa, we ought to sit down and reflect on whether attending packed events is really worth it.

In his virtual address on Wednesday, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize maintained that there may possibly be an exponential growth in infections.

The part perhaps that should worry all of us all is his statement that: "We must expect faster-rising numbers with a possible higher peak than the first wave."

Instead of worrying whether President Cyril Ramaphosa will at any given time impose restrictions on alcohol or cigarette sales or place restrictions on areas of entertainment, our greatest preoccupation should be mechanisms the government should put in place to ensure that we don't arrive at a situation where we see mass burials.

There are fears and concerns over the fact that another lockdown would further cripple an already ailing economy. These concerns are warranted but the behavioural patterns of various sectors of society should also be brought into question and scrutinised very closely.

We still have people who simply refuse to wear masks, maintain a safe social distance or adhere to all health protocols. Professor Karim is thus perhaps correct to indicate that tough action needs to be instituted against festival organisers.

They need to ensure that they enforce strict measures at their respective festivals and not place profit before the safety of their customers.

This tough action we speak of should be meted out before we lose any more lives in a year that has been nothing but hell for many.

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Editor Sifiso Mahlangu
Newsdesk 011 633 2410/2411
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Mail: Box 1014, Johannesburg 2000
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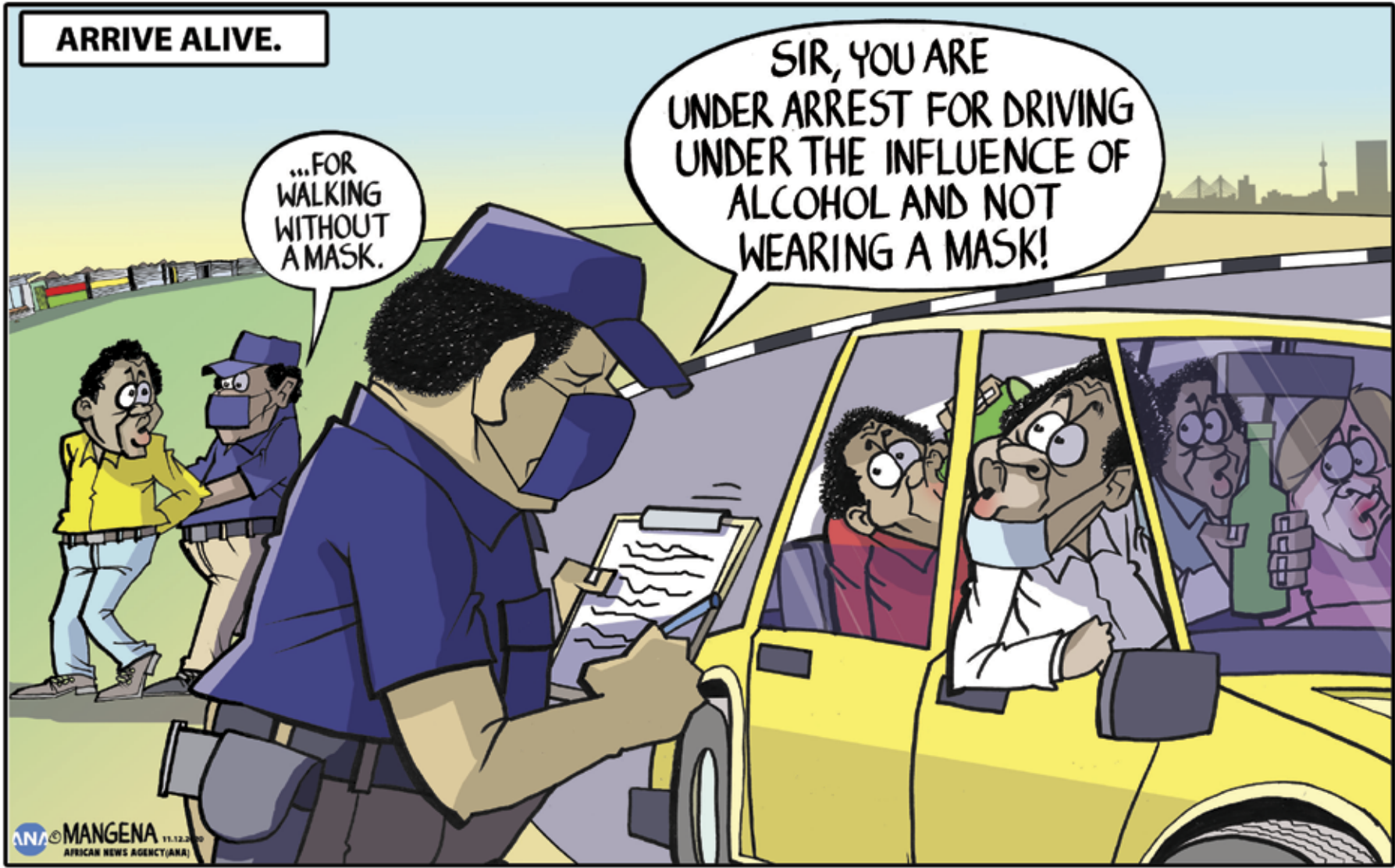
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opinion



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Joe Biden should not seek US dominance

It will only suck the US into more endless wars and counter-terrorism operations

THE euphoria of a Biden win has been quickly tempered by growing concerns over his cabinet picks – which suggest a foreign policy in which the US will seek to dominate more than co-operate. President-elect Joe Biden recently said: “the US should sit at the head of the table”.

If that is the trajectory that the Biden-Harris team seeks it will be a grave mistake. The politics of arrogance has characterised decades of US foreign policy-making and it has made the US many enemies. No country should assume that it is superior to all others and should therefore assume the right to preside over them at the head of the table. As Dr Martin Luther King once said: “Instead of us trying to dominate the world, we should show solidarity with it.” That approach would take the US much further.

In a world in which extremist non-state actors continue to proliferate and push back against US hegemony, a foreign policy that seeks to dominate will only serve to suck the US into more endless wars and counter-terrorism operations. Sadly that may be precisely what some of Biden's advisors and cabinet members want to give their close connections to the US military-industrial complex. While some have praised Biden's pick for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, given his stated commitment to human rights and humanitarian intervention, this has often been used by Democrats in the White House as a pretext to justify war.

GLOBAL EYE



SHANNON EBRAHIM
shannon.ebrahim@inl.co.za

Former President Barack Obama very effectively packaged and sold US wars to the American people and the Europeans, in effect prolonging those wars indefinitely. The war in Afghanistan was marketed as a humanitarian project to help people, rather than what it really was – a geo-strategic effort to control the region and its resources. It was the Obama-Biden team that oversaw the US military intervention in Libya and Yemen and supported the coup in Honduras. Biden defended these wars as he did the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It was Biden and his soon-to-be Secretary of State Blinken who developed a proposal to partition Iraq into three separate regions based on ethnic and sectarian divisions – the classic recipe for divide and rule.

On the campaign trail, Biden said he wanted to end the US's “forever

wars” and that he was against the war in Yemen. But at the same time, he published an editorial he co-authored with neoconservative Robert Kagan that says the problem with the war in Iraq was not the war itself but its poor execution. After 17 years of chaos and bloodshed in Iraq emanating from the US military intervention based on non-existent intelligence, it is very rich to say that the US intervention was justified. Two terms of the Obama administration did not help to stabilise Iraq and instead left the Iraqis to defend themselves against Isis, which took advantage of the chaotic nature of the state and terrorised its people.

Blinken is seen by many on the left as particularly problematic to spearhead US foreign policy, given his symbiotic relationship with corporations seeking military contracts. Blinken was the co-founder of West Exec, a secretive consulting firm that sought out contracts for the Pentagon from companies. Blinken personally profited from negotiating contracts between corporations and the Pentagon. This is what is referred to as the revolving door of the military-industrial complex. Avril Haines, who is the nominee for director of intelligence, was one of the advisors to West Exec, which operated according to the motto “Bringing the Situation Room to the Board Room”. Haines is considered a hawk by those on the left, considered infamous for authoring the drone playbook that normalised targeted assassinations.

Last week, in his most recent commentary on the future trajectory of US foreign policy, Biden said that China must play by international rules and norms. But will the US do the same in a marked departure from its past behaviour on the global stage?

Will the US end its escalating drone warfare programme that violates international law and has killed thousands of civilians? Will it end its official use of torture, close Guantanamo Bay, and put an end to renditions that violate every human rights law in existence? Will, the US stop supplying the Saudi-led coalition with arms and intelligence to prosecute its war against the people of Yemen, many of whom face starvation? Will the incoming Biden administration stop trying to dictate who should govern Latin American countries and attempting to destabilise governments with leftist agendas? Will Biden lead by example and end the grossly unjust economic embargo of Cuba and enable the country to trade internationally without US sanction, have access to essential medicines, and open up trade and tourism with the island nation?

If the Biden team cannot answer in the affirmative to the above, it has no right to lecture China or any other country on their adherence to international rules and norms. And the US will not deserve any prominence in global decision making.

Ebrahim is Group Foreign Editor at Independent Media

Strengthening child protection efforts

SAMPSON ADDO YEBOAH

CHILD-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Africa often use international policy guidelines in their effort to protect children. They also depend on international donors to fund their activities.

NGOs rely on standardised childhood policy frameworks, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Little attention is given to indigenous knowledge on childhood, and its inclusion in child-focused interventions.

We conducted a study to explore the interplay between these two worlds. The study, using an ethnographic method of participant observation and interviews, explored indigenous knowledge on child protection

in a rural cocoa growing community of Ghana.

We explored rural parents' attitudes to an NGO intervention on children's rights to basic schooling, and the illegality of child labour. We focused mainly on the effects of indigenous knowledge on the outcomes of a child-rights based intervention; and interactions between parents and staff of a child-focused NGO.

Findings from the study show that parents' perspectives on child protection were fundamentally different from those promoted by NGO front-line workers and the UNCRC. Rural parents viewed child protection as providing for the physical well-being of children and making sure they were trained in the norms and customs of the community.

Based on our findings we recommended that for sustainable child protection interventions in rural Africa, child-focused NGOs working in these settings should meaningfully merge local knowledge on childhood in their intervention programmes.

What can be done to ensure sustainable NGO interventions in rural communities of Africa?

First, local child-focused NGOs should stop treating indigenous knowledge on childhood as obstacles to childhood development.

Second, NGOs should identify local structures that can handle local problems. They should work with these to improve the situation of children. These local structures should take the lead in implementing interventions in the local community with NGO

staff serving as resource people with the aim of establishing an intervention that seamlessly blends local and international knowledge on childhood development.

Child-focused NGOs in these instances should strive to disseminate knowledge that is practical and capable of shifting parents from old ways of caring for children.

This would involve toning down the use of standardised best practices while factoring in the social structure and intergenerational relations within family systems in rural African communities.

Yeboah is a researcher and applied social scientist at the Department of Applied Social Sciences at Hong Kong's Polytechnic University

COMMENT



PATRICK MUTAHI



STEVEN REBELLO

Recovering from Covid-19 through greater youth economic inclusion

JUST nine months since the first case of Covid-19 was recorded in Egypt, more than 1.8 million cases have been recorded in Africa, with 43 000 people losing their lives to the virus.

As many states continue to focus on the front-line battle, attention should also be paid to how current and future generations of young Africans have been, and will be, affected by this pandemic.

Since 2019, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies have collaborated on studying ways of strengthening youth social and economic inclusion in southern and East Africa. The research, which focuses particularly on how South African and Kenyan youths have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, reflects on its implications for marginalised youth across the continent.

Key features of the South African government's response to the pandemic have included mass screenings, testing, contact tracing, as well as different levels of restrictions. The most drastic of these restrictions included the announcement of a 21-day national lockdown. Followed by a month of still largely restrictive level 2 measures, South Africa's economic activity almost ground to a halt, with the country recording a 51% decline in GDP for the second quarter of 2020.

On March 26, 2020, the Kenyan government announced a 7pm to 5am curfew, which was revised on August 27 to 9pm to 4am. While in-country travel restrictions were lifted on July 7, the night curfew will remain in place until January 3, 2021.

President Uhuru Kenyatta warned that by the end of this year, over half a million Kenyans might have lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

While South Africans and Kenyans of all ages and walks of life have been affected by Covid-19 and the accompanying restrictions, multiple studies by the International Labour Organisation have highlighted how youth are often the first and worst affected by health and economic crises. Young women aged between 18 and 24 were often worst affected, both due to the sectors within which they worked and the added gendered burden of child care and family responsibilities.

Looking forward, the reports also suggested that youth unemployment rates may rise by as much as 10%, signalling that the youth unemployment rate may rise to 63% in South Africa. Similarly, the rate of joblessness doubled two months after Kenya reported its first case of Covid-19 in March, rising to 10.4% from 5.2%.

The direct impact on the lived realities of young people needs to be considered in conjunction with the budgetary effects of the pandemic, which will affect how states may be able to support youth development.

With these challenges in mind, why and how could the South African, Kenyan and other African states support youth economic inclusion in the pandemic and post-Covid-19 eras? Firstly, suggesting that youth inclusion should be prioritised does not suggest that other age groups should be neglected. Prioritising youth economic inclusion recognises the dynamic nature of the global labour market and the need to create and provide further training programmes for emerging job opportunities and sectors.

We need to be looking to youths not just as beneficiaries, but as a key stakeholders in the attempt to solve many of our intractable problems.

Mutahi is a Research Fellow at Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies in Kenya and Rebello is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa